

Ways and Means Health Subcommittee Chairman Nancy Johnson and Ranking Member Pete Stark today released a letter they are sending to Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson. The letter makes detailed recommendations regarding improvements to the Medicare program that can be undertaken administratively and promptly.

“Today's bipartisan recommendations represent an aggressive approach to modernizing and strengthening Medicare to better meet the needs of seniors in the 21st century. These proposals will change the way the Health Care Financing Administration works with providers and beneficiaries. By creating a collaborative relationship from regulation writing to technical assistance with new complex billing procedures, I believe these reforms will enable our small health care providers to survive. Since millions of seniors depend on small hospitals, home health care agencies and nursing homes, I consider this letter a strong step toward preserving access to care for our seniors.

These recommendations will also improve the quality of Medicare services by allowing health professionals to focus on caring for patients rather than dealing with confusing regulations that divert precious hours from caregiving. Additionally, the recommendations will improve the efficiency of Medicare by significantly reducing bureaucratic red tape and stripping out regulations that are not necessary to program integrity,” said Chairman Johnson.

“I am pleased to join Chairman Johnson in forwarding these recommendations to Secretary Thompson, and I hope that he will seriously consider them,” said Mr. Stark. “In response to the Secretary's request for additional funding for HCFA, I plan to work with him and our colleagues in Congress to provide the additional resources needed to fulfill its responsibilities.”

Many of today's recommendations are the result of Subcommittee hearings on strengthening the Medicare program. Members and program experts also work together in weekly seminars to focus on particular elements of Medicare in need of improvement. In past months, Members solicited, listened to and evaluated suggestions to make Medicare less bureaucratic and more workable.